

The Way Made Clear

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After years of traveling a road set before me from birth, the words of Jesus Christ taken from John 14:6, “*I am the way, the truth and the life*” put me on a completely new path. My life has been eternally changed and the darkness of deception has been turned to the light of uncompromising truth.

I was born into a Roman Catholic family with traditions that went back to the time of St. Thomas the Apostle who was martyred in South India in 52 AD. Another tradition in Kerala, South India tells of a merchant by the name of Thomas of Cana from Syria who came to Kerala in 345 AD with 72 families. We believed that we descended as Roman Catholics from these families.

Whether these traditions are true or false, I was brought up by my parents in the strictest discipline of the Catholic religion. On the seventh day after I was born I was baptized. My education was in Roman Catholic schools, which adhered to the rituals and discipline of this religious system. I held the traditions, beliefs and practices to be true and was attracted to the long mantle-cassock of the priests and the beautiful vestments for the Holy Mass and other ceremonies. When I graduated from high school I was told that my vocation was to become a priest like my late Uncle, Rev. Matthew, my father’s brother.

I joined the minor seminary in 1963. After two years of study, I entered St. Thomas Apostolic Major Seminary at Kottayam. My courses in philosophy began in 1965 and were completed in 1968. These three years subjects such as the ancient philosophy of Greece, Medieval and ancient psychology, modern psychology

and logic were studied. During summer holidays I helped my parents at home and the parish priest by teaching catechism classes for the youth and organizing their activities.

Then I began four years covering every aspect of systematic theology. Holiday periods I continued to help the parish priest and had different pastoral experiences in other parishes as well. On Sundays I preached sermons, organized youth and assisted parish priests in other ways. When these years concluded I was ordained a priest December 21st, 1972. Ordination day was celebrated with much solemnity. The people including my parents kissed my hands and looked at me with respect and admiration. I was taken up by this attention.

In my priestly life I was an orthodox Catholic, giving allegiance to the Pope as my ultimate authority. I daily administered the sacraments routinely performing the traditional practices of the Catholic Church until the grace of God brought a change into my life. I became spiritually unsettled and even miserable as the validity of infant baptism and auricular confession for the forgiveness of sins as well as vain practices such as the veneration of images and the worship of Mary as the Holy Mother of God became offensive to me. Unbiblical dogmas and the infallibility of the Pope also disturbed me. My faith in the real presence of Jesus in the bread and wine of the Eucharist diminished over time. I continued silently in this state of mind knowing that if I voiced my doubts, I would be ostracized, persecuted and even physically harmed by the Roman Catholic community with the backing of bishops and priests.

In 1985 and 1986 I came in contact with a beloved man, Simon Kottoor, who had left the priesthood. Simon really knew the Lord and was walking in Him with noticeable joy and contentment. He led me to the Bible. I developed the habit of reading the Bible every day without failure whether I understood it or not. As God's Word became part of my thinking, I began to understand that the Roman Catholic Church is not in conformity with the Bible in many things.

Through Simon I was introduced to the writings of another former priest, Bart Brewer, director of Mission to Catholics International, in San Diego, California USA. I had access to tracts and books published by this ministry. In time I came to see that God's Word is truth as Jesus so clearly said in His prayer the night before His crucifixion, "*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.*" (John 17:17) And I also came to know that truth has absolute authority for life and holiness – "*the scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). So the Lord used Simon Kottoor to open my eyes to the Word of God and His precious gift of salvation.

Although I do not know the exact day I was saved, I was being drawn by God to be saved especially in 1994 and 1995. I was greatly influenced by the following Bible verses "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the father but by me.*" John 14:6; "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Romans 10: 9-10); "*For through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*" (Ephesians 2:18); "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (Romans 10: 13); "*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 2:4).

Gradually while I still lived as a priest, I lost confidence in the sacramental system and personal good works, which were supposed to accomplish a process of salvation. God's Word, convicted me of my own sinfulness, which no ritual practices could rectify. When it became clear that only Jesus Christ could save me from sin and its effects, I immediately believed and was immediately saved.

What relief and freedom! The only perfect offering for sin that God the Father could ever accept. I had been taught that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world was not sufficient, that we must expiate for our sins. Penance, satisfaction, the merit of others, especially Mary and the saints could also save us according to Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. This is blasphemy. Jesus Christ, who is fully

also save us according to Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. This is blasphemy. Jesus Christ, who is truly God and fully man provided the completely sufficient payment for all sin. The doctrines and traditions of Romanism undermine God's free gift of salvation received by all who believe in Jesus Christ.

In the Vatican Council II Document (No.6) *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, it is stated,

“...they (saints) have carried their crosses to make expiation for their own sins and the sins of others. They were convinced that they could help their brothers to obtain salvation from God who is the Father of mercies.” and “...they (the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary) are truly immense, unfathomable and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by His grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.”

Such teaching clearly contradicts God's Word and enslaves those who follow it to a life-long system. The only way to be saved is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. (Ephesians 2: 8-9) Salvation is not by my works or the works of any person dead or alive. “...for by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10: 14). Romans 11:6 clarifies further: “And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.” When I believed my sins were expiated totally having been paid for in full by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. I was declared eternally righteous by God because Christ's righteousness was credited to me.

The Roman Catholic Church claims that: “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, Who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Para. 1992) The sacramental system is a program of works, which nullifies the grace of God putting man-made conditions and restrictions on unmerited favor. The affirmation of infused righteousness as a basis for justification is a negation of consistent biblical teaching. It is God who justifies. The only justification before God is obtained by belief in the gospel, that Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again for my sins. Those who believe this truth are saved. Justification is positional legal righteousness in Christ. He is the only foundation for the legal residence of the believer: “To the praise and glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Ephesians 1:6)

Romans 3:23 and 6:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” and “the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord” convicted me that I am a sinner and everyone is a sinner in need of a savior and salvation. I also came to know that Jesus Christ alone can save me because the Father “made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus Christ completely paid the price of my sin and only faith in this finished work of the cross could save me or any man. Salvation is a gift of God, it cannot be acquired through our merits. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) In the light of this truth I gave up depending on good works and the sacraments.

Jesus Christ alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The traditions, practices and dogmas of the Catholic Church blinded me to this truth. The Catholic Church is not in Christ because she teaches a false way that leads to death; the works she adds to the all-sufficient work of Christ undermine the unmerited favor of God, the grace-gift of salvation. Regarding this Paul says: “I do not make void (or nullify) the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Galatians 2:21)

After accepting the gift of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, I was to live by faith, depending on God for every provision. Knowledge of God's Word would continually direct me in His way. One law

showed me that the Roman Catholic Church goes against what God teaches by prohibiting marriage for priests. In Genesis 2:18 it says *“And the Lord said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help fit for him.”* And Word of God explains that *“forbidding to marry”* is a departure from the faith, an example of false doctrine. (1 Timothy 4: 1-4) The Lord in His love and grace gave me a partner for life when I left the Roman Catholic system. Eight years after leaving a parish where I had met Mercy we were married. She too was brought up in the strictest discipline of a Roman Catholic family and was spiritually uncomfortable with all the man made doctrines. The foundation of our relationship is the Lord, and He has blessed us with a son, Lance, born on October 23, 1996.

God’s faithfulness was also evident in my life in the person of Dr. Jacob Chelli, Director of Berean Baptist Bible College and Seminary in Bangalore. Dr. Chelli was used by the Holy Spirit in my life to continue to instruct me in His Word. Under Dr.Chelli’s teaching I became fully convinced of the need to be baptized. Mercy also took many lessons in the Word of God at this time. The command to be baptized as a believer is a public witness to the reality of a believer’s identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. On July 6, 1997 Dr. Chelli baptized my wife and I at the Bible College Chapel. This was a glorious testimony to our victory in the Lord.

As we live in Christ, the words of Jesus in Luke 6:22-23 give us strength, courage and consolation to face every testing and tribulation and what Satan and his forces bring against us. *“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.”*

I give deepest heartfelt praise to God for calling me and my wife, Mercy, to be born again in Christ Jesus by the grace of God. We are in the Light now, free from the darkness of the deceptive system of Romanism. In the beginning we were reluctant and worried about abandoning the rosary and the other traditional prayers that we used from our birth. Now we know that the Mass is meaningless because we see in Hebrews 10:10-12 that the sacrifice Christ offered was complete, no one can add to His perfect work. The sacrifice of the Cross cannot be repeated; it is finished in God’s eyes. The Mass is not the same as the sacrifice on Calvary, as the Catholic Church teaches. God’s Word tells us *“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”* (Acts 16:31). The only thing that is needed for salvation is to believe that Christ died, was buried and was raised from the dead, accepting Him as our Lord and Savior. Romans 4:5 says, *“to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”*

Mercy and I are no longer afraid to profess our faith in Jesus Christ before others. By God’s grace we have the courage to deny Roman Catholic teachings even before Catholics and Catholic priests. God has given us a boldness to proclaim His truth before anyone and everywhere. Our relatives and friends have abandoned us and we are not allowed to go to our birthplaces and our houses because they are ashamed of us. My family was a priestly family; I was the sixth priest. This made them very proud. I am considered one who has spoiled the Roman Catholic name of my family.

We are encouraged by many who are saved and have become our friends. I thank God that we are children of God and that we are truly free. Thank God that we now enjoy the peace of Christ, which He gives to His own. In John 14:27 we read, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* Psalm 18:2 says *“The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.”*

As long as we are fixed on this rock and fortress, no one can take away our peace. His words must be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). If this is true in our everyday life the way will remain clear for us despite rejection and trial and we will walk by faith in the victory Christ has accomplished

for us.

Dear Reader, if you are not yet right with God, admit that you are separated from God because of your sins. *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23). When you admit that you are a sinner you must understand that *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). That means that you need to come to life and salvation because you are dead spiritually. This you cannot do yourself because there is nothing of merit in us that could ever help earn our salvation, there must be some one else who can bring you to salvation. You need a substitute, the Scriptures says that there is one just like that, Read 1Peter 2:24, *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree”*. That one is none else than Christ Jesus. So He must be believed on, as your righteous substitute. Salvation is only through believing in Him as your personal savior and Lord, and also confessing Him with your lips. (Romans10: 9-10) So if now you are convinced that salvation is only through trusting in Christ’s substitution death in your place, express your heartfelt belief directly to God. You will be saved eternally or in other words you will have eternal life with Him. The Apostle John testifies to this in his first letter with the words, *“This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* (1 John 5:11) Praise The Lord!

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Joseph is now in ministry to the Catholics with the aim of convincing them of the Biblical truths. He visits Catholic families in Bangalore and whenever possible in distant areas, he also distributes tracts. He is translating some tracts into Malyalam, his mother tongue. He also conducts a Bible study and prayer in his house on every Friday evening, about six families attend. He teaches Sunday school also at the *Tabernacle Baptist Church*, where Joseph Athyalil is the Pastor.